

and veterans whose deaths were service-connected, and veterans who receive clothing allowances because they wear or use prosthetic or orthopedic appliances.

The second bill—H.R. 3118, the Veterans' Health Care Eligibility Reform Act of 1996—includes many elements of the proposal that the National Performance Review, led by Vice President Gore, recommended to establish a modern, integrated health care system that will improve access to, and care for, the Nation's veterans. The bill, for instance, authorizes the Department of Veterans Affairs to furnish comprehensive medical services to all veterans, expanding the array of services that it now provides. Eligibility

reform has been a high priority of veterans for many years, and I am pleased that we finally could enact it.

Finally, the third bill—S. 1711, the Veterans' Benefits Improvements Act of 1996—expands and extends numerous veterans education, housing, life insurance, and employment and training benefits.

NOTE: H.R. 3458, approved October 9, was assigned Public Law No. 104-263; H.R. 3118, approved October 9, was assigned Public Law No. 104-262; S. 1711, approved October 9, was assigned Public Law No. 104-275.

## Statement on Signing the Helium Privatization Act of 1996

*October 9, 1996*

I have signed into law today H.R. 4168, the Helium Privatization Act of 1996, which privatizes the Department of Interior's Federal Helium Refining Program—as the Vice President's National Performance Review had recommended.

Once, our defense and aviation industries had a strong need for helium and the Nation lacked a market to supply it. A Government program was appropriate. But today, over 90 percent of U.S. helium needs are met by private producers

and suppliers. A Government-operated program is no longer needed. The private sector can meet, and now will be able to compete to supply, the needs of all users.

The bill brings us closer to our goal of creating a Government that works better and costs less.

NOTE: H.R. 4168, approved October 9, was assigned Public Law No. 104-273.

## Statement on Signing the Federal Aviation Reauthorization Act of 1996

*October 9, 1996*

I am pleased to sign into law today H.R. 3539, which will improve the security of air travel and carry forward our fight against terrorism.

After the TWA 800 disaster last summer, I asked Vice President Gore and a commission of experts to recommend improvements in our aviation security practices to protect against terrorist or criminal attacks. The Vice President's Commission on Aviation Safety and Security delivered its recommendations to me on September 9—45 days after it began its deliberations—and this bill complements and builds upon those recommendations.

The bill, for instance, gives the Federal Aviation Administration new authority to require criminal history checks for airline security screeners. Airline passengers will benefit from safety provisions such as the new requirement for airlines to share information on pilot performance to help make better hiring decisions.

The bill also codifies and builds upon my recent decision to give the National Transportation Safety Board responsibility to serve as the primary contact and liaison for families who have lost loved ones in an air disaster. Now, the families will know exactly where to go and

whom to speak to in the Federal Government if such a tragedy occurs.

In addition, the bill provides for continuing critically needed funding for airport development work in order to advance the safety, security, and capacity of our Nation's airports. Similarly, it authorizes appropriations for the FAA's operations; research, engineering, and development; and facilities and equipment programs through the end of fiscal 1998. This authorization comes upon the 50th anniversary of the Federal airport grant program.

Moreover, this bill also marks another historic occasion for aviation in America. Almost 4 years ago, my Administration set out to achieve the kinds of new authority, flexibility, and empowerment that the FAA needed to meet the increasing challenges posed by a dynamic air transportation industry. This year, working with the Congress, we achieved FAA personnel and acquisitions reform, helping to pave the way for faster, cheaper, and better air traffic control system modernization.

Nevertheless, we still needed to press for FAA financial reform. Congressional aviation leaders on both sides of the aisle have joined with us to help ensure that as we shrink the Federal Government and constrain the budget, the FAA can obtain the resources so necessary for its vital safety, security, airport development, and air traffic control work. The National Civil Aviation Review Commission, established under H.R. 3539, will create the foundation for a careful analysis of what funding mechanisms will best address the needs of our air transportation system. This is a tremendous step towards a predictable, stable source of future funding for the FAA.

The bill's reform provisions also will help foster an improved FAA-aviation industry partner-

ship through the establishment of a Management Advisory Council to advise the Administrator. They also complement the personnel and acquisitions reform that we achieved earlier by giving the FAA new tools to streamline day-to-day operations and by establishing new goals for speedier agency rulemaking actions.

I am very disappointed that the Congress included a controversial amendment of the Railway Labor Act in this legislation without the benefit of public debate or hearings. I have, however, signed H.R. 3539 into law because the sponsors of the amendment and the Committee of Conference have assured me that section 1223 merely restores the exact legal standards for coverage under the Railway Labor Act as they existed prior to the effective date of the ICC Termination Act of 1995. Neither the amendments to the Railway Labor Act, nor the fact that it has been amended, should be interpreted as affecting coverage under the Railway Labor Act.

The bill that I have signed into law contains many important aviation provisions. This achievement would not have been possible without a strong spirit of bipartisanship as well as a tremendous amount of work on the part of many. The new tools provided the FAA, along with the safety and security enhancements of this legislation, will benefit air travelers for years to come.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

The White House,  
October 9, 1996.

NOTE: H.R. 3539, approved October 9, was assigned Public Law No. 104-264. This statement was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on October 10.

## Remarks in Knoxville, Tennessee *October 10, 1996*

Thank you. Thank you very much. Thank you so much for that wonderful reception. It's nice for me to be in Knoxville, sort of riding along on Al Gore's coattails. I enjoy being here. *[Laughter]*

I want to thank everyone who has been a part of the program today. Dr. Parker, thank you. And Mildred Buffler, thank you. And I want to thank our great Secretary of Education, Dick Riley, my former colleague when we were Governors together. And I think unquestionably